

IN THE SENATE OF THE UNITED STATES.

FEBRUARY 18, 1858.—Ordered to be printed.

Mr. MALLORY made the following

REPORT.

[To accompany Bill S. 159.]

The Committee on Naval Affairs, to whom was referred the petition of Thomas J. Page, commander United States navy, praying that he may be credited with the amount of losses sustained by and charged against him in the settlement of his accounts as acting purser, while in command of the expedition for the "exploration and survey of 'La Plata' and its tributaries," have had the same under consideration, and report :

The petitioner, a lieutenant in the United States navy, under the order of the Secretary of the Navy, took command of the steamer *Water Witch* during her late cruise of three years and five months, in the "exploration and survey of the river 'La Plata' and its tributaries."

In addition to the duties of commander of the ship, he was ordered to perform those of purser, though he expressly requested to be relieved from them, because of his want of familiarity with them, and with accounts generally. He was not even allowed a clerk by the department. The extent of country to be explored, both by land and water, necessarily involved, at various times, not only a separation of portions of the officers and "ship's company" from the vessel, but also made it necessary that the petitioner himself should be absent for periods of from one to six months. It will be perceived that, had he remained on board to attend in person to the duties of purser, he could not have properly discharged, under his instructions, the more important duties of the expedition, and that, in obeying these instructions, he was necessarily compelled to entrust to others not only the command of the vessel, but the discharge of the purser's duties also.

From the diversified character of the duties thus devolved upon him, it necessarily followed that the accounts rendered were very numerous. Notwithstanding this, there is not the expenditure of the smallest amount of money which has not been fully accounted for, nor a bill contracted which has not been recognized as made under the authority of his instructions.

The losses incurred, and for which he is held responsible, arise from payments made to sailors who deserted from the vessel in debt to the government; from errors made by the purser's steward (on whom he was compelled greatly to rely) in the calculation of the sailors' terms of service; from errors in a bill of exchange; from errors made by the steward in the calculations, &c. During the three years and five months the petitioner disbursed \$112,000 in money, and about \$10,000 in provisions and clothing.

The whole has been faithfully accounted for. The money for which he is held responsible was not spent contrary to law, but through ignorance, in part, of regulations with which he could not have been supposed to be familiar, inasmuch as they did not relate to his duties proper, and he knew nothing of their existence, and, in part, through errors of the steward, in whom, as above stated, he was necessarily obliged to confide much in the calculation of accounts, &c. The statements of the petitioner are fully sustained by his oath, and also by the certificate of Lieutenant William N. Jeffers, one of the officers on said expedition. The items disallowed amount to \$354 46, and, under the circumstances of the case, your committee, satisfied that Commander Page acted faithfully and with his best abilities for the public interest, should have those credits allowed in the adjustment of his accounts, and they report a bill accordingly.